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Housekeepers Chat

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U. S. Department of Agriculture

Not for Publications

Subject: "Toys to Fit the Child." Quotations from article in "Children, The Magazine for Parents." Menu and recipe from Bureau of Home Economics, U. S. Dept. of Agriculture.

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Before I planned today's talk, I took a tour through the toy section, of a large department store. I had never seen so many expensive, beautifully-dressed dolls, nor so many complicated, perfectly useless, mechanical toys. I found myself actually feeling sorry for the poor children who are going to get these things for Christmas. Just imagine, if you can, being a little girl of six, and having a life-size doll, which is too beautifully-dressed to play with. Or imagine being a little boy of six, and getting an electric toy which will do nothing but run around a track, or up a string, time after time. Wouldn't you get tired of it?

I learned a lesson from Billy last summer. When I left home for a week, I promised to bring Billy a present. I didn't have time to buy presents till the very last minute, so, in order to keep my promise, I bought a clever mechanical toy, at the union station. Billy was much pleased with his present, for about ten minutes. Then he put it back into the box.

"What's the matter, Billy?" I asked. "Don't you like your new toy?"

"Aunt Sammy," said Billy, "I can't think of anything to do with it, unless you will let me take it apart."

Really, there was nothing else the child could do with the toy, except to wind it up, and watch it go, and wind it up again.

Billy has a playmate who gets more out of her toys than any little girl I know. Betty Jean is five years old. She has a whole family of dolls-- nice, friendly, washable dolls, which can be dressed and undressed, several times a day.

Betty Jean's dolls live in a house on the window seat. On Monday morning, when her mother does the family washing, Betty Jean gets her small wash-tub, her washboard, her clothesline, and her clothes. When the dolls' clothes are dry, they are ironed with a small electric iron, on a small ironing board.

On Friday, Betty Jean cleans her doll's house -- which is home-made, by the way. She sweeps the floors, and dusts the toy furniture, and polishes the tiny enamel dishes, and tin spoons, till they fairly gleam.

When her mother sews, Betty Jean gets out her own sewing basket, which is equipped with large-eyed needles, blunt-pointed scissors, thimble, and bright colored bits of silk and gingham. Betty Jean has not yet learned how to use a thimble. The last time I saw her sewing, with her mother, Betty Jean was wearing a thimble on her thumb, and looking extremely grown-up. She informed me gravely that she was making a pair of rompers for the smallest rag doll, but she didn't intend to put elastic in them, because elastic was tight, and made red rings on children's legs. Need I tell you that Betty Jean has a very wise mother?

When Betty Jean comes over to see Billy, I notice that they play a great deal with Billy's blocks. Billy has a big collection of blocks, -- square blocks, long blocks, triangles, and cylinders. I give Billy all my empty spools, and all the small cardboard boxes and pieces of cord which appeal to him. The children can spend hours making things with blocks. They build everything from houses and railroads to regular farms. Last night while I was washing the dishes the children came into the kitchen, hunting for a "silo".

"We're making a farm," explained Billy, "and we need a silo to put down by the barn, Aunt Sammy."

I found an empty oatmeal box, which did very well as a silo, although it was somewhat out of proportion to the rest of the farm buildings.

The other day I read an article about toys for children, which contained this statement: "A child is educating himself, through his play in the home, just as he is being educated in the school. As he plays with his toys, he is experimenting, thinking, planning -- that is, if he has playthings which give him these opportunities."

Let me quote one more paragraph: "One of the chief joys of childhood is 'making things'. Christmas day, and the days to follow, will be happier if the Christmas stocking holds a good box of crayons and paper on which to draw; a box of paints; a pair of blunt-pointed scissors, and a tube of paste." This reminds me of one gift I saw in the toy department -- a small roll-top desk, with a low chair. I should like to buy that desk for Billy. Wouldn't it be fine to keep crayons and pencils and paper in?

We must not forget the scooter, kiddie-car, roller-skate type of toys. They encourage physical activity, and should be of the best type. There are horizontal bar and trapeze sets, too, which can be set up in the living room or the play-room on rainy days, when the children can't play out of doors.

The author of the article I mentioned says that in selecting toys for children, the following points should be carefully considered:

First, is the toy suited to the child's development?

Second, is it made to stand good hard wear?

Third, is it hygienic-- washable?

Fourth, is it safe-- no sharp parts or pieces that will break off?

Fifth, has it many play possibilities?

Sixth, is it attractive and artistic?

Among the toys which should be avoided are the grotesque dolls, with their foolish, "flapper" expressions, and the queer animals and reproductions of comic newspaper characters. It is not necessary to buy these things for children, when there are so many artistic, wholesome, childlike toys.

Other toys to be avoided are the over-elaborate, expensive ones. One of the best examples of this is the elaborately fitted-up doll's house, which costs a great deal, and is so complete that it has few "play possibilities." A simple, home-made doll's house is better.

In selecting our Christmas gifts, let's not forget that there should be some value, or purpose, in each toy, game, or puzzle that we give to children. And it might not be a bad idea to apply this same rule to our gifts for grown-up friends.

Our menu today is a lunch for children. Dishes they will all like: Brown Stew of Beef; Mashed Potatoes; Carrots; Celery; and for dessert, Prunes and Apricots, cooked together in equal amounts.

Would you like me to tell you how I make a brown stew? I buy lean beef from one of the less expensive cuts. My recipe has six ingredients.

4 tablespoons flour	1 quart water
2 pounds beef	1/4 cup chopped parsley
Salt	Pepper
1 small onion, chopped	

Brown the flour in the oven or in a heavy skillet over low heat. Wipe the meat with a damp cloth, cut into small pieces, and roll in unbrowned flour. Try out some of the suet, add the meat and onion, and cook for a few minutes. Add the water, cover, and simmer until the meat is tender. Stir in the brown flour and salt and pepper, cook for 5 minutes, and sprinkle the parsley over the top before serving.

Let's check the menu. Brown Stew of Beef; Mashed Potatoes; Carrots; Celery; and Prunes and Apricots.

Thursday: "Questions and Answers."

